

**Ernest Austin, Founder
Ex-Offender Action Network**

**Comments to the
Little Hoover Commission
January 23, 2003**

My name is Ernest Austin. I am the founder and lead organizer for the Ex-Offender Action Network, commonly known as EAN. EAN is an organization of ex-offenders that is working to restore the rights and responsibilities of the formerly incarcerated. EAN currently provides HIV/AIDS training, limited job placement services, and peer support for persons who are trying to successfully reintegrate from prison into society. The following testimony is given in an effort to help the Little Hoover Commission identify effective, comprehensive approaches to prisoner reentry.

1. Community-based public and private entities should embrace the responsibility to provide core services and support to successfully reintegrate ex-offenders to California communities. These organizations, agencies and entities can do good work with ex-offenders, their families and their communities by helping ex-offenders to become productive, respectful, respectable Californians. And they can help communities that receive ex-offenders to accept them as valuable community members that can contribute to make the community a better place.
2. Parolees need core services and support to successfully reenter California communities that include peer support groups; employment screening, assessment, training and placement services; education; transitional and permanent housing; transportation; family and marriage counseling; male involvement and parenting training; leadership training and development; mental health treatment; information and referrals.
3. Every year for the foreseeable future, 650,000 offenders will be returning to local communities across the United States-40 percent to the State of California. Many will have served mandatory sentences that ignored judicial wisdom and discretion. In many of those cases incarceration may have been the least appropriate discipline. But these offenders, ready to successfully reenter communities or not, will be given \$200 gate money and a bus ticket back into the communities where they committed their crime. These communities are economically depressed, unforgiving and challenged to absorb them. The Ex-

offender Action Network is working with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches, Special Service for Groups/Faith In Communities, African American Alcohol & Other Drug Council, Regional Congregations and Neighborhood Organizations, Shields for Families and Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles among others to reintegrate ex-offenders into California communities as productive, respectful, respectable citizens.

4. Bureaucracy, punitive public policies like disfranchisement, and meager employment opportunities for offenders are the primary barriers the Network faces as it attempts to garner community support for reentry efforts. We overcome these barriers by educating and training our members in and about the process. We surmount many obstacles through multi-disciplinary partnerships in the community with institutions that support and value ex-offenders like churches, community development organizations, and employers who evaluate job applicants primarily on what they offer an enterprise.
5. One of the most effective parole supervision models we could employ would include partnership between church and community-based organizations like EAN that aim to support men and women as they come home to reunite with their families and the community.
6. Faith is indispensable in successful reentry because barriers and obstacles seem objectively insurmountable. Faith can provide the courage to make a way out of no way, and the faith community nurtures, supports and cultivates that faith.